DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 158 261 CS 004 323

AUTHOR Bateman, Kitty
TITLE Altering Students' Attitudes towards the Newspaper as a Source of Information: A Non-Toxic Approach.
PUB DATE May 78
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association (23rd, Houston, Texas, May 1-5, 1978) ; Best copy available

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Changing Attitudes; Community Colleges; Developmental Reading; Junior Colleges; News Media; *Newspapers; Questionnaires; *Reading Skills; *Remedial Reading; *Student Attitudes

ABSTRACT

In an attempt to find a print medium to which "reluctant readers" might relate with reduced negativism, students assigned to a community college reading remediation class used a daily newspaper, "The New York Times," in place of a traditional text. A newspaper was chosen because it covers a wide range of topics which vary in prose style from simple to complex, it lends itself to vocabulary study, it is an easily expendable material, and its content is both relevant and timely. A questionnaire was constructed for use as an initial and end-of-term instrument to discover what changes, if any, had occurred in students' attitudes toward newspapers. An analysis of the responses indicated that as a result of their studies, students generally felt themselves to be better informed. While most maintained their preference for television news, many recognized the limitations of that medium as a new source. Many felt that using the newspaper had increased their vocabulary levels, widened their scope of information, and influenced them to read more. The results indicate that appropriate and enthusiastic use of a previously unexplored medium can bring about positive changes in students' attitudes. (A copy of the questionnaire and two tables are appended.) (FL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED158261

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Altering Students' Attitudes Towards the Newspaper as a Source of Information: A Non-Toxic Approach

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Kitty Bateman

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

Kitty Bateman

May 5, 1978

CS004323

The student body with which this investigation deals consists of incoming freshman at Queensborough Community College of CUNY who are required to take at least one semester of non-credit remediation in reading. The reading deficiencies of these students range anywhere from three to five years below grade level as measured by the 1970 edition of the California Reading Test, Form A. Although this group exhibits a wide span of reading scores, all the students can be generally categorized as "reluctant readers". Indeed, they are products of the television generation and, as a consequence, they manifest a general disaffection toward the printed medium. My colleagues and I have recognized that this is a problem for many high school graduates and, consequently, we were anxious to find a medium to which our students might relate with reduced negativism. For many reasons, the use of a daily newspaper appeared to provide us with a non-toxic solution to our problem. Its offerings cover a wide range of topics which vary in prose style from simple to complex. Furthermore, the newspaper lends itself to vocabulary study (be it through the use of context, word structure or word lists.) In addition, it is an easily expendable material which affords students the opportunity to engage in a dialogue with the printed page. And, above all, it is both relevant and timely in its content. This is a particularly

important consideration for the "student of today." For all these reasons the newspaper is adaptable to individualization as well as group work and mitigates against the often negative and hence "toxic" effects of a traditional "text."

After one semester's use with the newspaper (in this case the newspaper chosen was The New York Times, a particularly prestigious paper with a generally high level of readability) we recognized the need for some ongoing assessment of students' attitudes. We, therefore, constructed an initial as well as end-of-term questionnaire in an effort to find the answers to the following questions.

1. Did our students perceive themselves to be well-informed?
2. How extensive was our students' acquaintainship with various news sources?
3. How critical were our students in their evaluation of these news sources? In particular, how did our students' perception of television news coverage compare with their evaluation of news coverage as presented in The New York Times?
4. How did students feel about using The New York Times as a medium for learning?
5. In what way did our students' opinions regarding the decision to use the newspaper as an instrument for instruction alter after a semester's exposure?

The results of the information that was collected and tabulated will form the basis upon which I will answer these questions. (see Tables 1 and 2)

Naturally, as in all data collection a certain amount of information is lost. Anyone who has used the questionnaire format is cognizant of the fact that there are always a certain number of students who drop out during the course of the semester as well as those who select not to answer a given question(s). Furthermore, there are those students who misinterpret a question(s) and, in that way, invalidate their answer(s). Nevertheless, I will attempt to give an overall picture of the questionnaire's results and, in addition, share with you some of the more revealing individual comments made by members of our student body.

On the initial questionnaire, in response to question #1, 67 students said that they felt they were well-informed, while 29 responded that they felt they were not. Ten students believed they were somewhat well-informed, and 32 did not give any response.

On the end-of-term questionnaire, however, 73 students said that they believed themselves to be well-informed while only seven felt they were not. When asked to explain what they believed they could attribute this change of attitude to, some typical student responses were: "I've learned many new vocabulary words," "The reading of <u>The Times,</u>" "....not reading all the Dear Abby problems,"

and "I believe I have developed a new habit of being more alert to up-to-date news, which helped me to broaden my knowledge." There were many more comments on this theme, all of which reflected the students' change of attitude toward both the reading act as well as the world around them.

An analysis of what our students relied on for news sources indicated that 51 regarded the newspaper as a primary news source. However, if we combined the primary responses to television and radio, we found that 64 students depended upon these two non-print oriented media for their news information. This data substantiated our general premise concerning our students' general avoidance of print.

Since we were particularly concerned about our students' perception of television news coverage, it was of great interest to evaluate what changes, if any, occured when they were asked at both the beginning and end of the semester if they believed television news coverage to be as good as, better than or worse than newspaper news coverage. Initially, 70 students responded that they believed news coverage on television to be as good as that presented in the newspaper, 34 students believed that television news coverage was better than newspaper coverage, and a scant 11 students, or 10% of the total responses, indicated that they believed television news coverage to be worse than that presented in the newspaper. At the

end of the semester, however, there is an interesting redistribution of student responses. While 42 students maintained that television news coverage was as good as newspaper coverage and 19 students believed television news coverage to be better than that presented in the newspaper, 20 students or 25% of the total responses, noted that they believed television news coverage to be worse than newspaper news coverage. This total reflects an increase of 15%. Some of the students who voiced this opinion documented their answers with the following reasons: "News presented in the newspaper is a lot more thorough and more interesting; you can draw a lot of conclusions and opinions of your own." "News on television gives you only the central idea of a particular subject. Newspaper coverage gives both central ideas and details," and "Because The Times gives you more deepth," (sic) So, even though a substantial number of students maintained their preference for television news coverage, there was a gratifying recognition by others that the newspaper covered a wider range of topics in greater depth than was possible in a television news broadcast.

The last question on which I've chosen to focus, has to do with students' attitude regarding The New York Times as a medium for the teaching of reading skills. It is of interest to note that even though the great majority of our students are not New York Times readers, 84 initially responded that they believed The New York Times would be of value to them. Some of the reasons put forth were:

"This way I'll know what is happening and I'll read it. Otherwise, I probably wouldn't read The Times," or "....it will teach us how to read a newspaper and between the lines of the journalists," and the invariably ambivalent respondent who says "Yes, it will keep us informed about things and also be good for our arm muscles (sarcastic)" (sic) and "No, because it will get the people who aren't interested in the news aggravated and upset to have to bring The New York Times to class." In addition, 21 students believed that the newspaper would be of no value to them and 14 offered no response.

At the end of the term our students' responses reflected something somewhat different, 73 students responded that they believed using The New York Times in class had been of value to them, a scant nine felt it had been of no value, and four stated some ambivalence. In reviewing the positive responses, it became apparent that many students perceived that using The New York Times had increased their level of vocabulary, widened their scope of information, helped them into feeling more comfortable with the paper's format and even influenced them to read more. Those few students who expressed ambivalence based it on the fact that though they felt the newspaper was worthwhile, its mass of information overwhelmed them.

In conclusion, I should like to say that I found the results of this inquiry positive as well as revealing. It indicates to me

that students' attitudes towards the newspaper as a source of information can be altered during the course of a semester's exposure, and that this change in attitude is in a generally positive direction. It further reinforces my notion that the appropriate and enthusiastic use of a previously unexplored medium can result in a positive change through non-toxic means.

INITIAL NEWSPAPER INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Do you consider yourself well-informed?

2. What are your news sources? List a least three preferences.

First _____
Second _____
Third _____

3. Do you read a newspaper or newspapers?
If yes, which one (s) ?
How often?

4. Which section of the newspaper do you turn to first _____

second _____ third _____?

5. Do you watch the news on television?
Number your preference.

6 O'clock news _____
7 O' clock news _____
10 O' clock news _____
11 O' clock news _____

6. In your opinion, is the news as presented on TV

as good as _____ , better than _____ or

worse than _____ news coverage in a newspaper?

7. Do you believe that most newspaper journalists are qualified to write on their topics?
Explain your answer.

8. Do you believe that most journalists tell the truth?

Explain your answer.

9. Do you feel using The New York Times in class will be of any value to you?

If yes, explain.

Table # 1 - Results of Initial Questionnaire

Question #					Total # Responses
1	Yes	No	Somewhat	N.A.	
	67	29	10	32	138
2		1st	2nd	3rd	
	T.V.	48	33	15	96
	Radio	16	30	34	80
	Newspapers	51	36	23	110
6	as good as		better than	worse	
	70		34	11	115
9	Yes		No	No Answer	
	84		21	14	119

END OF TERM NEWSPAPER QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Do you consider yourself more well-informed now than you did at the beginning of the semester?

   If yes, do what do you attribute this change?

2. What are your news sources? List at least 3 preferences.

   First _____, second _____, third _____.

3. Which sections of the newspaper do you turn to first _____.

   second _____, never _____?

4. Do you still follow the news on T.V. ?

   If yes, number your preference.

   6 O' clock news _____
   7 O' clock news _____
   10 o' clock news _____
   11 O' clock news _____

5. Is the news as presented on T.V. as good as _____,

   better than _____ or worse than _____

   news coverage in a newspaper?

   Explain your answer.

6. Do you believe that most journalists are qualified to write on their topics?

   Explain your answer.

7. Do you believe that most journalists tell the truth?

   Explain your answer.

8. Do you feel that using The New York Times in class has had any value for you?
   Explain your answer.

Table # 2 - Results of End-of-Term Questionnaire

Question #					Total # Responses
1	Yes	No	No Answer		101
	73	7	21		
5	as good as	better than	worse		81
	42	19	20		
8	Yes	No	N.A.	Mixed	111
	73	9	25	4	